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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EPET](#) [TX](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: TURKMEN OPPOSITION VISA SCANDAL REALLY
ABOUT INTERNAL UKRAINIAN POLITICS

REF: USOSCE-EMBASSY KYIV JANUARY 25 EMAIL

Classified By: Political Counselor Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4(a,b,d).

11. (C) Summary. The scandal that has erupted over Socialist Transportation Minister Mykola Rudkovskiy pressuring Ukrainian ambassadors to issue visas to Turkmen opposition figures to travel to Kyiv in late December in the wake of former Turkmen President Niyazov's death is, at its heart, the latest battle in the struggle by the President's team to protect what remains of its eroding power and to carve out its role in foreign affairs rather than an issue of democracy versus gas supplies. It also features some internal coalition dynamics, with Rudkovsky a target of Regions' pressure and his ministerial seat, overseeing plum resources and contracts, in their sights. On January 20, respected newspaper Dzerkalo Tyzhnya broke the story that Prime Minister Yanukovych had ordered an internal investigation into Rudkovskiy for inviting the opposition figures to Kyiv without notifying the government. The Presidential Secretariat increased attention on the story by calling

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publicly on January 23 for Rudkovskiy to be fired for his disregard for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the presidential role in foreign policy.

12. (C) Comment: Although the Presidential Secretariat couched its criticism of Rudkovskiy in terms of his having threatened Ukrainian-Turkemistani relations, its specific focus on the violations of protocol, the publication of a December 28 letter from Yushchenko to Yanukovych calling for an investigation into the issue, and the lack of criticism directed at Our Ukraine MP Mykola Katerynychuk also involved in arranging the opposition meetings in Kyiv all suggest that this controversy has little to do with the Turkmen opposition's presence in Kyiv. Yanukovych initially may have sought a way of removing an irritating Socialist and may have been concerned that Rudkovskiy's actions could have potentially damaged the GOU's relationship with Turkmenistan's leaders at a time when Niyazov's commitments may be re-examined--the opposition figures reportedly offered lower gas prices in exchange for support. However, once Yushchenko took an interest in Rudkovskiy's removal, Yanukovych chose to defend his minister. End summary and comment.

The Minister, the Ambassador, and the Visas

13. (C) There were signs in early January that Rudkovskiy, an abrasive lieutenant of Socialist Party leader Moroz who helped broker the Socialist "betrayal" of Our Ukraine and the Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT) in forging a new coalition with Regions and the Communists in July, had become a target of Regions' efforts to oust him. On January 11, Volodymyr

Makeyenko, a deputy faction leader for Regions, told us that Regions was disgusted with the amount of power the Socialists had within the coalition, given its small size. Regions thought the Socialists held too many ministerial posts. Makeyenko said they were specifically targeting Rudkovskiy as the first to go and that corruption-related issues would be the pretext. (Note: This was the mechanism used in late 2006 attempts to unseat Interior Minister Lutsenko and Defense Minister Hrytsenko).

14. (SBU) Dzerkalo Tyzhnya (DT) broke a story on January 20 about Rudkovskiy's role in procuring last-minute visas for Turkmen oppositionists Hudayberdi Orazow and Nurmhammet Hanamow to travel to Ukraine in late December 2006 to announce their opposition to the interim government in Ashgabat and their unified candidacy for upcoming presidential elections. According to DT and a January 23 press conference by Deputy Head of the Presidential Secretariat Oleksandr Chaliy, Rudkovskiy called the Ukrainian

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Ambassadors to Austria, Bulgaria, and Norway on December 22 in the middle of the night to demand visas for the opposition leaders be issued before opening of business the next morning. The ambassadors reportedly told Rudkovskiy that because the Turkmen had refugee status, they needed an official invitation before they could issues visas, which had to be coordinated through the MFA. Rudkovskiy, according to Chaliy, promised that everything had been approved, but it had not been. Visas were issued in Vienna, Austria. (Note: after the scandal broke, Rudkovskiy told the press that he had called the Ambassadors "as a private person, not as a Minister."). In addition, DT reported that Ashgabat had accused the two opposition figures of embezzlement and issued a warrant for them through Interpol, suggesting that even if the charges were unfounded and political in nature, Kyiv would have been in an awkward position without having advance notice to prepare for the visit.

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15. (SBU) Note: the Turkmen opposition meetings took place December 25 to moderate publicity, with Orazow and Hanamow holding a press conference afterwards. Interestingly, the Ukrainian politician named publicly as having helped organize the meetings was OU MP Mykola Katerynychuk; Rudkovskiy's involvement was initially not mentioned.

Pressure from the PM...

16. (C) Dzerkalo Tyzhnya claimed that Yanukovych, incensed about the supposedly awkward position in which Rudkovskiy had put Ukraine, ordered the government to launch an internal investigation into why Rudkovskiy was involved in issuing visas to Turkmen opposition leaders. At a January 10 Cabinet meeting, Yanukovych reprimanded the Transportation Minister. (Comment: Yanukovych may have been concerned about preserving good relations with whomever becomes the next leader of Turkmenistan, or this may have been the beginning of the campaign to unseat Rudkovskiy which Makeyenko described to us. End comment). An MFA colleague suggested another theory, also mentioned in the DT story, that Rudkovskiy was acting on the basis of instructions from Moscow -- that bringing Turkmen opposition figures here would complicate or harm Ukrainian-Turkmen relations and the existing gas deal.

17. (SBU) Note: According to the January 2006 RUE-Ukraine-Russia gas agreement, Turkmenistan supplies 41 bcms, or 55% percent, of Ukraine's yearly natural gas consumption, at a lower price than Russian-sourced gas (\$100 vice \$230/tcm). In practice, Turkmen gas likely travels no further than Russia, with all Ukrainian-bound gas provided from Russian wells. Ukraine's paper gas "mix" allows Gazprom to save face in making its "market pricing" arguments to other European countries, while monopolist gas supplier

RosUkrEnergo supplies below-market priced gas to Ukraine. While in Kyiv, the Turkmen oppositionists supposedly offered to strike a new, cheaper gas deal with Ukraine if Kyiv supported them, which could have been embarrassing for the GOU. Rudkovskiy owns a short section of a domestic gas distribution pipeline and is believed to have links to energy trading companies in Ukraine, a likely explanation of his interest in Turkmenistan gas.

...and the President

18. (C) The Presidential team took the controversy further on January 23, while Yushchenko was in Switzerland for medical treatment, when Chaliy held a press conference to announce that Yushchenko had requested the internal investigation of Rudkovskiy on December 28 and that he was now asking Yanukovych to dismiss Rudkovskiy. Chaliy initially framed the issue as Rudkovskiy having endangered Ukrainian-Turkmen relations, which could jeopardize gas supplies. However, Chaliy subsequently laid out a second, probably more decisive factor: Rudkovskiy had circumvented the Foreign Ministry and Presidential Secretariat in the foreign policy process by issuing orders to an Ambassador. On January 24, Rudkovskiy told the press that Presidential Secretariat Chief Baloha had asked the SBU to open its own investigation, although an SBU spokesman was noncommittal on its role.

What's really involved? Internal political maneuvering

19. (C) As soon as Yushchenko jumped on the "dump Rudkovskiy" bandwagon, however, Yanukovych jumped off and began defending the Minister. The PM even denied that he had ordered an investigation, although on January 25 Deputy Prime Minister Tabachnyk publicly acknowledged that the investigation was ongoing and might be concluded by early February.

110. (C) Comment: It is striking that Yanukovych should drop Regions' plans to remove Rudkovskiy when it became apparent that to do so would be to accommodate Yushchenko and presidential prerogative as well. While a quick read of Presidential Secretariat statements may make it seem that Yushchenko was criticizing someone for facilitating the meeting of Turkmen opposition politicians trying to fight a rigged transfer of power, the attack on Rudkovskiy and the dismissal of Ambassador to Austria Yelchenko (below) has little to do with the Turkmen angle. In the December 28 letter Yushchenko sent Yanukovych, which the Presidential Secretariat made public in mid-January, Yushchenko cited the

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concerns that Ashgabat might have about opposition meetings, but seemingly acknowledged the concerns without endorsing them. Our Ukraine MP Katerynychuk, who was publicly identified in December as the coordinator of the Turkmen

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opposition meeting, has not received any subsequent criticism regarding his role in the meeting. That suggests that any genuine concern about potential fall-out in the bilateral relationship with Ashgabat is secondary at best.

111. (C) Comment continued: Instead, the heart of the controversy is about the Presidential Secretariat making an example of a minister who directly tasked Ukrainian diplomats in other countries, without going through the MFA or the Presidential team which, in theory, controls foreign policy. As the Yanukovych government continues to encroach on Presidential responsibility, Yushchenko's team is trying to find ways to assert presidential prerogatives. A secondary element, at least initially, may have been the intra-coalition struggle between Regions and the Socialists, and Regions' interests in cutting the Socialists down to size after having given them many plum positions to defect in July 2006.

Diplomatic footnote: a split decision?

¶12. (C) Yushchenko also signed a decree December 28 dismissing Yelchenko as Ukrainian Ambassador to Austria for authorizing the visas without proper permission, although this only became known after DT's Rudkovskiy story broke. Chaliy said that the President's main goal was to make sure that all officials understand that they must follow orders and protocol and not to act outside these boundaries. Chaliy added that although the decree dismissing Yelchenko had been signed, it would not be promulgated until Yelchenko "completes his diplomatic assignment in Austria." The Ukrainian mission to the OSCE told USOSCE January 25 that Yelchenko would remain as Ukrainian Ambassador to OSCE and that a new Ambassador to Austria would be appointed (ref A). Our MFA counterparts concurred, noting that Yelchenko would remain as Ukraine's Ambassador to both the OSCE and UN-related agencies in Vienna. There was no information yet about a new Ukrainian bilateral ambassador to Austria.

¶13. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kyiv.
Taylor